

Berra Signs 4 Yankee Contracts

*3 Are Meaningless,
 but the Other Is
 Worth \$50,000*

By JOHN DREBINGER

Baseball contract signing may have descended to a level that is just about the lowest form of "cheesecake." Camera bulbs flash and there is no end of to-do as the player affixes his signature to a blank piece of paper. Actually, no one ever sees the contract and the event really wouldn't be news at all unless the player took the contract and tore it up.

But this doesn't hold when Yogi Berra is the signee. The Yankees' redoubtable catcher still can put on a terrific show without half trying. He was at his best yesterday at the Yankee offices, where he signed for \$50,000, the same salary he received last year. This in itself was most remarkable, considering that on the day he reported to the Bombers late in 1946 he prompted one critic to remark: "That guy don't even look like a Yankee."

Yogi got matters rolling right off yesterday when somebody asked him how he liked his new palatial home in Montclair, N. J. "Great," he replied in his guttural bass. "It's fulla rooms. And the ground all around the place is fulla trees."

Here General Manager George Weiss, who rarely gets into these things, offered an interesting tid-bit. It seems that the good-natured Berra, in his zeal to make the signing for the photographers as realistic as possible, actually signed three blank contracts.

Trusting Catcher Grins

"So," said Weiss, "we now have in our safe Yogi's signed contracts, which we are at liberty to fill in at our own figures." Yogi, a trusting soul, grinned.

It wasn't, however, until the interview swung to baseball that it really went off on a tangent. As the scribes plied Yogi with questions, Manager Stengel, also present, supplied all the answers.

"Yogi," asked one writer,



The New York Times

Casey Stengel, right, peers over shoulder of Yogi Berra to see catcher's contract at Yankee offices yesterday.

"since you did most of the catching, what do you think went wrong with Bob Turley last year?"

"Well," said the Yankee skipper as he cleared his throat, "I'd say there were days when Turley looked as good as ever. Right, Yogi? (Yogi nodded). He pitched a one-hitter, two two-hitters and a four-hitter. Right, Yogi? (Again Yogi nodded). But he win only eight where the year before he win twenty-one. How do you explain that? Yogi didn't even try."

It wasn't until the inevitable question, "What do you think went wrong with the Yankees last year?" that Yogi found Casey occupied with scratching his knotty shinbone. Berra here came up with perhaps the most succinct explanation yet advanced.

"I guess it was one those years when it looked like nobody could do nothin' right," he said. And before Casey could come up with a fresh head of conversational steam, Yogi added an observation that contrasted

sharply with the less optimistic views Stengel had expressed at his own press conference on Wednesday.

Two Hurlers Hold Key

"I think we got a good chance to win this year," said Berra. "Much depends on our two young pitchers, the right-handed Jim Coates and the left-handed Bill Short. If they come through, we could make it."

Of his recent trip to Rome, Yogi said his one disappointment was that he had been unable to gain an audience with the Pope. "I just couldn't catch him," explained Yogi.

However, he did visit the Vatican and was tremendously impressed. Asked what he thought of the paintings in St. Peter's Cathedral, he said: "They're all right—if you like painting."

Thirty-five next May, Berra remains the sole active Yankee player of Stengel's nine pennant-winning teams, a string that began in 1949. He also played on the 1947 team that won the pennant under Bucky Harris. Yogi is a three-time winner of the American League's most-valuable-player award.

Important Meeting Today

Today the spotlight reverts to the Continental League, which will hold its most important meeting thus far, in the Delmonico Hotel. At this session, with Branch Rickey presiding, it is expected that Buffalo will be admitted formally as the league's eighth club. All eight cities will be represented, the others being New York, Toronto, Minneapolis-St. Paul, Dallas-Fort Worth, Houston, Denver and Atlanta.

The International League also is slated to hold an important meeting today, in Buffalo. In addition to discussing indemnity terms it will ask of the Continental League as compensation for losing two of its biggest cities—Buffalo and Toronto—the International League finds itself with an even more immediate problem on its hands. This concerns Havana, which may be dropped by the league because of the political situation in Cuba.